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ART. IX. — *The Memoir and Writings of JAMES HANDASYD PERKINS.* Edited by WILLIAM HENRY CHANNING. Boston: Crosby & Nichols. 1851. 2 vols. 12mo.

MORALISTS of the old school were wont to draw a strongly marked distinction between personal and social duties, as if the two classes rested on different bases of obligation, and were capable of being separated, not only in ethical discussion, but in actual life. Until recently, what is called personal virtue had the precedence. The purpose and the effort to do good were not essential to a high reputation for excellence. A large measure of selfishness and penuriousness, contracted sympathies, bigotry, intolerance, self-isolation, were hardly deemed blots upon a character, especially if to freedom from vice, and systematic habits of business and care for one's own household, there were added the decencies of religious profession and observance. The tendency of our own times is towards the opposite error. Doing good is regarded as of more importance than being good. Men think of themselves as beneficent machines, rather than as souls endowed each with an independent existence and destiny. Conscience is made an external organ, and its province is to ferret out the sins of classes and communities, not to detect one's own moral infirmities. Philanthropy is deemed not only the first, but almost the sole, duty. Men, who never learned to subdue their own passions, occupy the van in the assault on the inveterate wrongs and evils of the body politic. We know some people who, when a stranger is named, ask in their cant phrase whether he is a *reformer*, (not whether he needs reformation,) and who think that they fully know his character, when they have learned to what benevolent societies he belongs, and at what kinds of public meetings he makes speeches. Things have now reached such a pass, that almost every cause of humanity that deserves championship is in the hands of the very men whose services are a perpetual disservice; while informal and miscellaneous modes of influence are all that remain for those, whose self-discipline fits them to be the guides and helpers of their brethren.

Meanwhile, personal excellence and social usefulness are

inseparable, and bear so close a proportion to each other, that the one may invariably be assumed as the measure of the other. A good man is every day and hour throwing off proof impressions of himself. He is enacting, not playing, the philanthropist in his labor, in his traffic, in his casual intercourse, in his home life, in the very scenes and transactions in which he makes the least show of benevolent intent. His mere presence creates a purer moral atmosphere. An obscurity or retirement can no more suppress his beneficent agency, than linen garments can smother fire. He can make his virtue inefficient only by becoming a voluntary recluse, and then he ceases to be good. One's usefulness depends on his quantity of character, and is enhanced by every accession of purity and strength, — by every finer touch and richer hue of spiritual beauty. Nay, the very traits of the inward life, which if genuine are hidden, and of which a show is made only by those that lack them, — those habits of thought and feeling which ally the soul to God and heaven, — pass as factors into the sum of operative benevolence, and are transmuted into the utilities and amenities of common intercourse. Nor is this law for the expression of character materially affected by what is called a more or less favorable position. Could outward means and opportunities have well been less ample than they were in the case of John Pounds, the cobbler, in his stall ten feet square? Yet we can hardly conceive that any exaltation or enlargement of his sphere could have made him more useful. Indeed, the power of example bears an inverse proportion to the capacity of active benevolence. One who occupies a conspicuous place, and has the ability to perform signal services for others, discourages imitation, except on the part of the very few who move on the same social plane. On the other hand, he who has neither the full purse, the ready tongue, nor the fluent pen, and who therefore is scarcely conscious of doing good to others, may present an example which no beholder need despair of attaining, — a goodness which seems within the reach of all, because self-nurtured and unproped from without, — a beneficence which none are too poor or ignorant to copy.

An indefinite or fluctuating position might appear least of all propitious as regards usefulness; but it is, in fact, injurious

to the perspective, rather than to the actual power, of character. The man who has a permanent post of business or professional duty is a well-known, trustworthy, calculable element in the current moral force of society, — a fixed luminary of registered magnitude and lustre; but for that very reason, his beneficent agency has its limits, which are but seldom and casually overpassed. On the other hand, he who seems never to find the right niche, and the phases of whose outward life are hardly less numerous than his years, though less distinctly recognized in his influence, may give a succession of fresh impulses to successive circles of his fellow-men, — impulses which outlast his immediate agency, and are still propagated when he is forgotten. His unsettled life may indefinitely multiply his opportunities and enlarge his sphere, while his virtue is made more venerable, lovely, and attractive, at once by its diversified manifestation, and by its having passed the frequent test of vicissitude and disappointment.

But we are disposed to regard this unsettled, desultory, vacillating mode of life, as the result less of circumstances than of character. Some men are nomadic by constitution; and to this type belong not a few of the loftiest minds and the noblest hearts. No one, who would lead a true life, is conscious of fully reaching his aims and embodying his conceptions. Every profession and condition has its untoward circumstances, its malign influences, its distasteful associations, its belittling drudgery, its defective standards. Every position, too, has its demands so intense, so vast, so various, as to give the consciousness of incompetency, and to suggest the yearning for a sphere of duty more favorable to self-culture and unembarrassed influence. It is, no doubt, the part of wisdom to make a truce with one's aspirations, to be and do all that he can in the place where his lot is cast, and to content himself with its resources for increasing excellence and usefulness. But some good men are by the necessity of their nature morbidly sensitive to the straitnesses and disadvantages of their present condition. They are impatient of obstacles which will not yield to a first assault, of a standard which they cannot elevate by immediate effort, of task-work which seems fruitless as to the higher ends of their spiritual being. They imagine that limitations and necessities, which are inevitable conditions of human existence, are their

peculiar misfortune. Such men are the tent-dwellers of civilized society. They dread the contracting and secularizing tendencies of a settled life; and, with noble energy of purpose, in the spirit of sincere self-sacrifice, they are perpetually devising new plans, launching out into new enterprises, and creating for themselves new modes and spheres of social duty. Nor is it failure or misfortune alone that sustains the nomadic habit. Such spirits are rendered even more uneasy by success or the promise of it. They are prone to regard emolument or applause either as a token that they have parted with their integrity and simplicity, or as the world's retaining fee to pledge them to the wrong side in the conflict with evil.

Mr. Perkins, the subject of the Memoir and the author of the other Writings in the volumes now before us, was one of the noblest specimens of the class of men whom we have just described. Of talents adequate for the highest place, of social endowments which rendered his intimacy a privilege ever to be borne in grateful remembrance, of a purity and loftiness of character which made his youth surpassingly lovely and the prime of his manhood venerable, he seems never to have attained a position which satisfied his spiritual yearnings, or gave him the consciousness of perfect freedom and entire adaptation to his sphere of duty. Always eminently successful, (except as to those pecuniary rewards which it was not in his nature to seek, or to retain if won,) he felt himself always distanced by the exalted standard and the ever-receding goal, which alone he could persuade himself to pursue. Never was a life so brief more full of great and varied usefulness; yet his intense self-distrust made him shrink from responsibilities, which no outward change could diminish, so long as he retained the eloquent address, the ripe wisdom, and the fervent philanthropy that won for him universal confidence, reverence, and love. Modest, unassuming almost without parallel, he was a centre of commanding influence, regarded with pride by the city of his adoption, honored in life and mourned in death as a public benefactor by men of all classes, sects, and conditions.

Mr. Perkins was born in Boston, in 1810. His early education was such as to fit him either for a mercantile life or for a course of professional study. He was happy in

enjoying the services of a series of teachers no less capable of aiding the symmetrical growth of his whole being than of imparting the mere rudiments of knowledge. Not to speak of the living, it was an inestimable privilege to have been, for several of the most critical years of boyhood, under the charge of Solomon P. Miles, a man who could give his pupils nothing better than his own example; and then to have passed from his tuition to that of Dr. Abbot, and to the scholarly and manly training in which Exeter has taken the lead among our New England academies. As a member of a family of merchant-princes, than whom none have done more to liberalize their profession and to adorn it by uncorrupt faith and munificent charity, James was destined for a commercial life; and at the age of eighteen, commenced his novitiate in the counting-room of his kinsman, Col. Thomas H. Perkins. But the details of business proved irksome to him, its temptations filled him with alarm, and even its most honorable walks seemed to him dishonored by the multitude of supernumeraries, who drain their subsistence from the public by arresting, rather than expediting, the passage of goods from the producer to the consumer. His morbid conscientiousness as to these matters preyed upon his spirits to such a degree, that he was sent abroad at the age of twenty, ostensibly on a business mission, but really to regain the healthy action of his mind. On his return, he resolved to take his final leave of commerce, and turned his face westward, with the purpose of becoming a farmer.

In February, 1832, Mr. Perkins arrived at Cincinnati, and, while waiting for the opening of spring to choose a location for his first experiment in agriculture, he was invited to spend his leisure hours in the law-office of his former tutor, Judge Walker. He became at once enamored with the law, and found himself a student in earnest of the books with which he had merely intended to beguile a brief and else idle interval of time. He was admitted to the bar with the most brilliant prospects, and established his reputation by his very first argument. But he had hardly entered upon his professional duties before he was again thwarted in his opening career by conscientious scruples, and by scruples for which his legal friends admit that, then and there, justifying ground was not wanting. He might indeed have labored, as those very

friends have, and not without encouraging success, to elevate the moral standard of the profession, and to connect with its practice those maxims of veracity, integrity, and frankness, which, so far as they prevail, check litigation and establish the reign of impartial justice. But he dared not trust himself to the encounter with licensed falsity and legalized iniquity. He feared lest he might contract the very stains which it would have been his mission to purge away from the fraternity with which he was numbered. He accordingly left the bar before the expiration of his first year. For a few months he was an editor. He then accepted the agency of a mining, milling, and manufacturing enterprise at Pomeroy, on the Ohio. This proved a failure, and nearly swallowed up the little capital which he had invested, leaving him with a young family to commence the world anew. He purchased a few acres of ground in the neighborhood of Cincinnati, intending to lay them out as a nursery and market-garden. While completing his arrangements for this purpose, he published a *Digest of the "Constitutional Opinions of Chief Justice Marshall,"*—a work which received the high commendation of Judge Story for its completeness, its lucid arrangement, and its felicitous style.

Meanwhile, his character as an upright and energetic citizen, his influence in every form of benevolent effort and progressive movement, and his agency in the establishment and support of the literary, educational, and moral institutions of the metropolis of the West induced his numerous friends to make a strong effort to retain him at Cincinnati. A Ministry at Large had been recently instituted by the First Congregational Society, of which his kinsman and biographer was then the Pastor. He was urged to accept this Ministry, and entered upon its duties in the winter of 1838–39. From that time to the day of his death, his chosen work was among the poor of the city. Here he found the true sphere for an unselfish and self-abasing spirit. The field was at first all his own; and, when others entered upon it, his was still the leading and controlling mind. He systematized the labor of relief, gauged and registered the various forms of pauperism and vice, and was the means of bringing the whole mass of destitution, ignorance, and crime in the city under the influence of Christian instruction and benevolence. As essential

parts of this work, he busied himself largely in the reform of the County Prisons of Ohio, in the amelioration of the condition of the colored population, and in the development of the common school system of Cincinnati, — a system founded under the auspices of emigrants from New England, and bearing a closer resemblance than can elsewhere be traced to the best school organizations of our northern cities. Finding the small salary attached to his Ministry inadequate to his support, he opened a school for young ladies, to which he devoted three hours of each day, without scanting the full measure of his missionary toil.

But the time had arrived, and the avenue was now opened, for his entrance upon the profession for which he had always been preëminently adapted, and which he undoubtedly would have chosen in his early manhood, but for the clinging weight of diffidence and self-distrust. He had been persuaded, in the absence of his friend and pastor, occasionally to lead the religious services of the congregation; and, the pulpit becoming vacant in 1841, he was unanimously elected their minister. He accepted the charge, though but in part and without any permanent contract. The arrangement was subsequently suspended and renewed; and at the time of his death, he was still the pastor in the choice and affections of his flock, though he regarded himself as but the occupant of the pulpit during a protracted vacancy. The affecting story of his death may be best told in the words of a friend, as quoted by Mr. Channing.

“For a period of between fifteen and twenty years, during which time we have known Mr. Perkins well, he has been subject to a sudden rush of blood to the head, which has produced distressing vertigo, at times greatly impaired his sight, and often thrown him into deep despondency. Within the past five or six years, he has suffered intensely from palpitation of the heart, often being incapacitated by this distressing affection for the discharge of his pastoral and other duties. On Friday last, a paroxysm of this kind was produced by the agitation he suffered in consequence of the supposed loss of his two children. In the morning of that day, one of his little boys, aged nine years, and another aged seven, rode to the city from Mr. Perkins’s residence, on Walnut Hills, with a neighbor, and were to return home in the omnibus, at the stand of which their father, who was to come in by another conveyance, was to meet them. Not finding them



there at the appointed time, Mr. Perkins feared that they had lost themselves, and commenced searching for them. Being unsuccessful, he became more and more agitated the farther he went, and finally employed the crier, who met with no better success. The search was at length abandoned, and in despair, and fatigued as he was, Mr. Perkins walked home, a distance of nearly four miles, whither his children had preceded him.

“He reached his residence about one o’clock in the afternoon, utterly exhausted; but, after lying down for a time, rose and dined. He could not, however, overcome the excitement into which he had been thrown, although the children were with him and well. He was restless and nervous to a degree never before witnessed by his family; and so continuing, about five o’clock he told his wife that he would take a walk to calm his nerves, but not be gone long,—that he wished to try and allay the excitement, but would be back before tea time. He went out thus, but did not return, and nothing was seen of him afterwards by his family or friends.

“Early on Saturday morning, a report was spread from the Jamestown Crossing of the Ohio, that on the previous evening a man had drowned himself from the ferry-boat at that point, leaving behind him several articles of clothing, among them an overcoat, in one of the pockets of which was found a memorandum-book, with initials in several places. A gentleman of the city, who happened to have business on the boat, asked to see the book, and upon opening it saw the letters ‘J. H. P.,’ with which he was familiar. He immediately rode to the residence of Mr. Perkins’s family with the information.

“Upon subsequent inquiry, it was ascertained that not quite half an hour elapsed between leaving his home and reaching the ferry, which is distant from a half to three fourths of a mile. With his arms folded and eyes bent upon the ground, he walked hastily on board, and crossed to the outer side of the boat, standing on the very edge, and looking into the water. There being no carriages, the bar was not up. The ferryman said, loudly enough for him to hear, ‘That man will be overboard if he does not take care.’ Mr. Perkins looked round, but did not speak. He, however, changed his position. This was the last that was seen of him. After a while, the collector discovered an overcoat,—in which was found the memorandum-book referred to,—a wrapper, a vest, a cap, and a pair of spectacles, all of which have been indentified as belonging to Mr. Perkins.

“The supposition among those well acquainted with the peculiar mental constitution of the deceased, and his severe physical sufferings, is, that his walk, instead of allaying his excitement,

still further increased it, till reason was temporarily dethroned. In a wandering mood, not knowing whither he went, he had doubtless reached the Jamestown Ferry, and in a paroxysm of mental aberration had thrown himself into the stream.

"The unusual fatigue and excitement of Friday morning had brought on a more violent palpitation of the heart than Mr. Perkins had ever before experienced. In lighter attacks, his friends have frequently thought his brain temporarily affected by his sufferings; and although nothing of the kind was observed by those who assisted him in the search for his children on Friday morning, or by his family when he left the house for the walk on Friday evening, it probably soon came on, producing the melancholy termination recorded of his beautiful and useful life."

In this rapid sketch, we have incidentally referred to the leading traits of Mr. Perkins's character. The most prominent feature of his spirit seemed the entire supremacy of conscience. His whole life was an embodiment of the principle of duty. Some men attach the sense of obligation only to their public life, and are careless of the daily details of domestic and social intercourse. Others are rigidly dutiful in little things, yet ready to surrender their self-guidance in professional or political conduct to the dictation of cliques, parties, or a multiform and Protean public. He united the strictest independence in all public relations and functions with a private life so sacredly guarded, so prudently ordered, and so watchfully governed, that Argus-eyed calumny might have dogged his steps and sat at his table, without finding matter of reproach or ground for accusation. If he committed any errors, they were on the side of undue self-denial and excessive self-sacrifice. Yet this close adherence to conscience was to him no ungenial or ascetic task-work. He was so absorbed in the love of moral excellence, that a serene gladness of spirit pervaded his walks of arduous duty, gave a rhythmical beauty to the prosaic details of philanthropic service, and imparted a glow as of heavenly radiance to his countenance and his social intercourse. The constant pressure of obligation was to him like that of the vital air, invigorating, refreshing, joy-giving.

We have never known a man, whose sympathies were freer, warmer, or more comprehensive. His was no exclusive or one-sided philanthropy. With his mind, time, and hands seemingly full, he was always open to new appeals for his

countenance and aid. He belonged equally to all classes and circles. The familiar friend of the poor, the patient instructor of the ignorant, he was at the same time intimately connected with every movement in the direction of the highest literary and scientific culture, and the intimate associate in their respective plans and departments of scholars and *savans* of every name and description. His simple hospitality and his most cordial attentions and services were bestowed, not only on those whom it might be on independent grounds a privilege to know or to aid, but on all who could plead the mere name of a stranger. Young men, especially those otherwise homeless, found homelike reception and kindness at his house, and, without the show of formal counsel, were warned and guided, and inspired with pure tastes and noble aims by his brotherly communion. An eminently good man of our acquaintance once said to us: "I never am brought even into the most transient intercourse with a human being, without feeling that I have a message from God for that person's good, and I am dissatisfied unless I have reason to believe that he has been made wiser or better by the interview." We do not believe that Mr. Perkins ever said any thing like this, or had established for himself any such rule of life; but his conscientiousness, his overflowing benevolence, and the readiness and versatility of his conversational powers must have produced this same result; and none but the unimprovable can have enjoyed his society without some healthful impulse toward a nobler, truer, more industrious, and more generous life.

The catholicity of his sympathies preserved Mr. Perkins from ultraisms of all kinds, while his hopeful enthusiasm shut him out of the ranks of the blindly conservative. He was too much of a scholar, not to reverence the past; he was too earnest a Christian not to labor for the future. He was a devoted friend of the negro race; but he entered with almost a slaveholder's self-consciousness into the complex and embarrassing problems involved alike in the continuance, the immediate abolition, and the gradual removal of the burden of slavery; and while his own views pointed to "*ultimate freedom* and *immediate action* that will fit for freedom," they were urged with a calmness, candor, and kind consideration, the prevalence of which throughout the country would

be of immeasurably better omen both for the Union and the slave, than the strongest manifestation of patriotic or philanthropic zeal. While he could not but perceive the vicious elements embodied in the social organization of modern Christendom, he was not a Socialist in the fanatical or destructive sense of the term. He had too precious a home, and too dear an interest in many homes not his own, to think with complacency of the barrack-life of the Phalanstery; and his strongly defined individuality and conscious need of an independent sphere of action indisposed him for any form of Communism. With him, the great social desideratum was the substitution of coöperation for hostile competition in the various departments of industry and commerce. Yet he trusted more to the gradual incorporation of Christian principle and feeling with the relations of capital, enterprise, and labor, than to any merely external measures of reform; for he found the root of existing evils, not in the present order of the family or of society, but in the selfishness of the unchristianized character.

It is often said of men both devout and kind, the living and the dead, that they were no sectarians. And, as the phrase is commonly used, we think the worse of him to whom it is applied; for it generally denotes a weak indifference to the prevalence of his peculiar religious views, which can result only from a lack of faith in their importance, or from a charity too feeble to transcend the half-amiable, half-despicable form of good-nature. But in a far higher sense Mr. Perkins was no sectarian. He had risen above "the centre of indifference," above the plane of sectarian warfare, to the centre of religious union. His opinions were not speculative dogmas; but had been transmuted in the earliest stages of their growth into those types of religious purpose, reverence, and love, which are common to the consciousness of all good men. He seemed incapable of holding any religious truth at such a distance from his heart, as to discern its metaphysical bearings. It might have been difficult for him at any time to say to what sect he belonged. He found in all spiritual experiences, which tallied with his own, modes of devotional feeling into which he could enter, — examples of holy living that awakened his admiration and attracted his affectionate regard. It was his repeated, and, had his life

been spared, it would no doubt have been a successful, effort, to reorganize the congregation of which he was minister, so that it could bear no name but Christian, could be charged with having no creed except the Bible, and should be an association not merely for Christian worship, but for the vigorous prosecution of works of reform and of charity.

As a preacher, Mr. Perkins formed a school by himself. His sermons were extemporaneous, and he devoted very little time to his preparation for the pulpit. Yet he always preached on subjects which had long occupied his mind, and with a cogency of reasoning and an affluence of illustration that could have been the fruit only of thorough research and prolonged and fervent meditation. His range of subjects was wide beyond all precedent, and embraced the leading social and political questions of the day, the characters of eminent men in every walk of life, and the numerous enterprises and interests of a busy and growing community. But his treatment of them was preëminently Christian. We heard him preach two sermons on the Political Aspects of the Times; and they were as thoroughly religious sermons, as full of unction, as heart-searching and heart-probing, as well adapted to the awakening of penitence, devout resolution, and the spirit of prayer, as if his nominal subject had been regeneration, or divine influences. At the close of the second of these services, he announced for the theme of the next Sunday evening the Life of Aaron Burr; and we have been told by one who heard him then, that a sermon more full of the profoundest views of human responsibility and divine retribution was never uttered. We have never known greater solemnity or impressiveness of voice and manner than his. In the commencement of a discourse, he seemed oppressed by diffidence, and by a deep sense of the inadequacy of human lips to the momentous office of an ambassador from God to man; but as he kindled with the glow of fast-thronging thoughts and emotions, his whole countenance was irradiated, the tones of his voice rose into lofty and commanding eloquence, and his vivid fancy and rich imagery almost painted to the eye the truths which he poured into the ear and heart. He lamented the lack of early theological training, and to the last persisted in regarding himself as only standing in the way of some better qualified preacher. Not

so thought his hearers ; for while he held the strongest and most cultivated minds more completely under his influence than they themselves were aware till they could listen to him no longer, the humbler and less intelligent members of his flock found themselves constantly nourished, guided, and elevated by his ministry.

Of the joint efficacy of his pure life, his disinterested charity, and his energetic and faithful discharge of his clerical office, the honor, which waited upon his last years and multiplied memorials of itself on his untimely death, bears ample testimony. He was at first identified with an unpopular denomination, and his reputation encountered the strongest prejudices, and won gradual and reluctant assent. Yet, at the time of his death, he had long enjoyed the cordial fellowship of Christians of every name, and sects with which his only connection had been that of spiritual fellow-feeling were ready to claim him as virtually their own. Journals and letter-writers of various denominations vied with one another in their tributes of veneration for his character and memory ; and the best men of the whole city were sincere mourners at his departure.

Our constant readers can hardly need an elaborate sketch of Mr. Perkins's literary character. His articles on Mohammed, Gregory, Saint Louis, and Loyola, on the Pioneers of Kentucky, and on the Settlement of the Northwestern Territory, once read, are unforgotten. Many may have written as well ; — few on so great a range of subjects, and with such abundance and versatility of resource. His style is simple and direct, vivid and pointed, rich in imagery, but rigidly chaste and severely pure. It has the glow of fresh thought and rapid composition, and at the same time the precision and thoroughness of careful elaboration. Metaphors are crowded, but never mixed. His words are thickset pictures ; but they never overlay one another, or present abrupt and harsh transitions or contrasts of coloring. His diction has the grace at once of spontaneity and of the highest art. But what impresses us most of all in his writings, is their perfect genuineness, — their truth to his own nature and his profound convictions. He never wrote for effect, or performed literary jobwork. His subjects were such as interested him for their own sake ; and his sole aim was to give his readers a literal

transcript of what occupied his mind, charmed his fancy, or enlisted his hearty sympathy.

Mr. Channing has performed his task as a biographer with equal candor and fidelity. He has resisted the temptation to represent Mr. Perkins's views and opinions as in harmony with his own. He gracefully blends much of the narrative of his own early life with that of his cousin, schoolmate, and inseparable companion, up to the time when their paths diverged; and then he retires into the background, and gives us the simple story of his friend's struggles and trials, successes and attainments. Yet the whole Memoir is so pervaded by more than a brother's love, and breathes so much of the spirit of a threnody of regretful, yearning, longing affection, that as we read it, its whole burden seemed, —

“ Ah ! te meæ si partem animæ rapit  
Maturior vis, quid moror altera ? ”

The second of these volumes consists almost entirely of articles originally published in this Journal, which it is therefore neither graceful for us to criticize, nor needful to quote. The first volume contains a great variety of pieces, juvenile compositions, contributions to newspapers and magazines, essays, tales, and poems. Tried by a Procrustean standard, these articles are of widely different degrees of merit; but, considered with reference to their dates, subjects, occasions, and purposes, they are of a singularly uniform excellence. They are in part interspersed with separate portions of the Memoir, and, thus arranged, form of themselves an autobiography, which needed but a slender thread of narrative for its entire completeness.

We have been delighted, and our readers can be no less so, with what we are told was a schoolboy sketch, “though revised at a later day.” Happy the family, which in these days of perambulating “help,” and Hibernian nursery guardianship, still cherishes the declining years or the fragrant memory of an

“ AUNT ESTHER.

“ My first and best, and oldest of aunts ! and yet no more my relation than the town-pump. Aunt Esther ! she was the nursing mother of the whole dynasty of —s, father and grandfather, son and grandson ; — they had all been fondled and spanked,

washed, combed, and clothed by the venerable maiden. From her I learned to love "lasses candy;" from her I learned to hate Tom Jefferson. Many an evening as I sat by her rush-bottomed and rickety chair, threading her needle, or holding, while she wound, skeins of silk or yarn, that I thought must be as long as the equator, — many an evening has she discoursed of the arch-rebel Napoleon, whom "she would have torn to flinders," she said, "if she could only have got her hands on him;" though the next day she would set free the very mouse that had stolen her last pet morsel of cheese; for she was a very Uncle Toby, or rather Aunt Toby, in such matters.

"She told me of Napoleon, and her little work-table was the battle-field. Here was the ball of yarn, and there was the half-finished stocking, and yonder was the big Bible, supported by the spectacle case. Old Boney himself moved among them in the form of a knitting-needle; and to this day I cannot think of the Little Corporal, but as a tall bit of cold steel, with a head made of beeswax.

"From her, too, came my portrait of Washington, whom she had seen during his visit to the North. Year after year did those well-beloved lips pronounce his eulogy, and often was the hourly prayer put up by me for a long life to Aunt Esther and General Washington; little did I dream that one who to me had just begun to live, had been dead these ten years and more!

"And then came the war and the Hartford Convention; and such a time as we had of it, up in our little back-room! I don't know what it was that preserved the nation; for there was Aunt Esther and I, and the whole race of —s, in such a passion that we almost walked to England dry-shod.

"Aunt Esther had one fault, — she was always too cleanly in her notions. It was probably because of her Federal and aristocratic associations, but certain it is that she could not even see a dirty boy without wanting to wash her hands. And this her most prominent organ was exercised most fully upon generation after generation, as each marched through her dominions. "As bad as to be washed by Aunt Esther," was a proverb in the dynasty. For many a long year no lines in the language were to me so pathetic and soul-harrowing as those from the Columbiad: —

"Still on thy rocks the broad Atlantic roars,  
And washes still unceasingly thy shores."

To be "washed unceasingly" was my beau-ideal of misery.

"Aunt Esther, familiar as she was, was still a mysterious being to me. I had never met any other of her name; and, having early in life heard the Book of Esther read, always thought of my old nurse in connection with Ahasuerus and Mor-



decai, and the tall gallows. Nor was the mystery diminished on being told, when I asked how long it was since Mordecai, that it was hundreds and thousands of years. How old she was I did not dare to ask !

"Brought up to bring up others, the venerable matron loved nothing so dearly as Scotch snuff and noisy children. When the storm waxed loudest in the nursery, she was most in her element, and walked undisturbed amid

"The wreck of horses and the crash of toys."

"Her chief text and comfort was that in which we are told that our Saviour blessed the children brought to him, and said that of such was the kingdom of heaven ; for to her it conveyed the idea that the place of rest would be brimful of babies.

"And I grew up, and another generation came forward to claim my rocking-horses, and my long-legged chairs. I went to school ; and when I came home, I found Aunt Esther just as of old, only (as the saying is) a good deal more so. But though to me time was a matter of some import, she defied it. Nay, I received a letter from my cousin, who had just been married, telling me that Aunt Esther had danced at her wedding. — was the old lady's last favorite ; gentle and kindly, she loved her foster-mother more than many do their own parents, and she meant to take the ancient to her new home, she told me. But when I arrived at Boston again, I found that this had not been done ; Aunt Esther could not leave the old nursery, with its yellow floor and barred windows ; and as little could she bear to lose her pet. From the day of —'s wedding, she began to go out ; her work on earth was done ; and from the arms of the last she had brought up in the fear of the Lord, she passed away to meet her new colony of infants beyond the skies.

"In one corner of the churchyard there had been a great oak, of which all had departed but a shell of bark a few feet high. From this shell, within a year or two, a young, tall sprout had sprung up. Under that emblem of the resurrection they laid the body of Aunt Esther. Above her they placed a three-sided obelisk ; upon the west side was carved the form of an aged woman, on the brink of the grave ; upon the east, that of a bright spirit springing from that same grave ; while upon the front was her name and age, — "Esther Pray, aged 91 years," with a part of her favorite text, perverted, and yet true, — "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Vol. i. pp. 19 – 22.

Our next extract is from an article on the "Prospects of the West," which may be assumed as a not inadequate expression of the aims to which Mr. Perkins consecrated the

whole power of his mind, the full fervor of his affections, and the unremitted labor of his maturer years.

“And what is a Christian Republicanism? It is not, in social life, a want of caste, and absence of rank; for as surely as one star differeth from another star in glory, so surely will those of varying tastes, powers, and habits walk apart from one another. In the hour of turmoil, the great deep may be broken up, and society, storm-shaken and chaotic, be devoid of all order and beauty; but when stillness comes back, the laws of social are as certain as those of mineral crystallization, and every layer, one above the other, will return to its place, silently, but surely. It is not, in politics, the absence of place, power, patronage; it is not that democracy which would, by rotation in office, place in the chair any and every man, nor that which would bestow office as a reward. It would, on the contrary, forbid the mass to hold place; it would silence him that shouted aloud of his services, and asked to be paid in power.

“The great idea,—as Coleridge would call it,—the great *informing idea* of republicanism is, not that distinctions, and ranks, and privileges are to be abolished, but that MERIT shall take the place of BIRTH, WEALTH, and PROWESS, and become the basis of an aristocracy; and *Christian* republicanism makes Christ the judge of merit.

“What is merit? It is genius, learning, experience, and, above all, character. It is whatever Christianity and the good sense of the time may make it. Merit was the basis of the European aristocracy, at a time when might of arm was merit. The error, the fatal error, was to make that which can belong but to the man descend, as an heirloom, to his sons; in that hour the true principle of rank was lost sight of.

“We wish upon this point to be clear. We therefore again say, that to us republicanism does not oppose differences of rank; it does not teach that men are born equal, or are ever equal; it does not level, for to level is ever to lower. No, it leaves those that are high there, and seeks to raise others to them; it differs from other forms of government in this, and only this, that its standard of height, its principle of classification, is wide of theirs.

“The true republican, then, will not seek to believe, or to make those about him believe, that he and they *are* as good as any; his desire and struggle will be to make himself and his fellows as good, not only as others, but as the oracle within tells him they should be. When a place is to be filled, he will vote, speak, write, for the man best fitted for it. He will revere the wise, and good, and aged, as men of a rank above his own; he

will look up to them ; they will be, in his eyes, nobles. But you will say this is so already. We reply, to some extent it is ; the mass *feel*, though they do not *see*, the idea we have spoken of ; they cry aloud, 'All men are equal,' and bow to thousands ; their acts mock their words daily ;—and why ? Because they do not think of inequality, unless in fortune, birth, and education ; they mean to say, when they speak of all men being born equal, that no man, merely because of the condition of his fathers, is high ; nor is, for any thing he may have himself done, entitled to other than the natural and certain results thereof. For instance, the son of Daniel Webster has not, because of his father's stand, a claim to any preëminence himself ; nor, having equal merit with his father, can he claim to give more votes than others, or receive a support from the state. But he can and will claim to exert a greater moral and intellectual influence than others, to stand higher and be more respected than others. And nature guarantees his claim, *for republicanism is the order of nature* ; the aristocracy of a republic is the aristocracy of nature. It is an error to think a patriarchal government resembles a monarchy ; the father rules on the ground of *merit*, not of birth ; he rules on the true republican ground, and so does the sachem of the Indian tribe. And each of nature's governors, each and all, rule on the score of merit,—merit measured by the unenlightened sense, while with us, as we have before said, the judge of merit should and *must* be Him that inhabiteth eternity.

"This Christian republicanism we hope will one day abide in the West ; it is the social and political philosophy which is to become the marked faith of this land. Old in theory, it will, applied to practice, be new ; and though it must ever come short of the point of perfection, much, very much, may be done towards its growth and power ; and much is doing even now, while we write.

"And a new religious philosophy is to spring up here ; not a new system of religious faith and rite, but new principles of religious thought, feeling, word, and action. Unitarianism we do not hope nor wish to see the one creed here ; identity of doctrine God never meant should be, for he gave us our minds, and placed us where we are ; by the last he made us Christians rather than Turks, and by the first he made us Calvinists, Methodists, or Unitarians. Until the original and broad differences between men are done away, the same proofs, arguments, appeals, will affect them differently ; and there is as little chance of their agreeing as there is that the herdsmen of Bukharia will become Christian. He may be made so, and the strong bonds of temper and training may be rent, and far-sundered sectarians be united ; but such

a union will not be general. One man is *born* a Socinian, another a Calvinist, a third a disciple of Emanuel Swedenborg. And never in this valley may the Sabbath smile upon a dead uniformity! Long may the follower of the Genevan here pour forth his unwritten prayer! Long may the clergyman of the Episcopal Church lose himself in the beauty and devotion of his most beautiful service, the Roman Catholic in his vast cathedral, speak the words of truth and wisdom to those who, of all, most need them, the Methodist seek God in the wilderness, and the Baptist call aloud to him from the watercourses! We would not blot out one church, nor take from any the faith which forms his staff.

"The religious *ideas* which we hope may become the life of faith here are those of the Reformation, as they were in the breast of Luther when passion slept, and the strong voice of his own good and right sense spake out. Freedom from naked authority; toleration in heart as well as act; modesty, hope, faith, in doctrine and demeanor; appeals to the reason — not the understanding which rejects mysteries that reason receives, but the true reason which takes hold on the mysterious moral, as on the mathematical truth, and believes — rather than passion and prejudice; — these form the central points of that philosophy which, old in the world of thought, is yet unknown in the world of feeling and action; but which we trust may find a dwelling upon our plains, and walk unfettered among the green pastures, and by the still waters, of the West." Vol. i. pp. 154–157.

Of the Poems we hardly know which to select. Mr. Perkins did not deem himself a poet. He certainly was one in the highest, truest, sense of the word; but perhaps less so under the infrequent shackles of rhyme and rhythm, than in the lofty breathing, rich flow, and harmonious cadence of his most animated prose writings. But the poems in this volume are precious because they are truly his, draped in the translucent purity of his spirit, veined with his lambent fancy, and fragrant with the aroma of his simple piety. The following "Invocation," beautiful in itself, will be read with deep emotion by those who knew him; for it will seem to them but a leaf from the book of his daily life, so visibly did heavenly communings chasten, exalt, and hallow his entire walk among men.

"SPIRITS who hover near me, — ye whose wings  
Beat back the Tempter, — whose sweet presence brings  
Calm, gentle feelings, wishes pure and kind,  
An eye for all God's beauty, and a mind

Open to all his voices, — still be nigh,  
 When the Great Mystery its broad shadow flings  
 Over earth's firmest visions, till they fly  
 Like phantoms of the night, and teach me how to die.

When my breath faileth, as the summer air  
 Fainteth at evening, — when my heart, whose care  
 Jesus hath lightened, throbs, stops, throbs again,  
 Then, slowly sinking, ceases without pain  
 Its noiseless, voiceless labors, — still be nigh ;  
 Let not the form of ghastly Death be there,  
 But to my clouded, yet clear-seeing eye  
 Reveal your forms of light, and make me love to die.

The pinions of the Dark and Dreaded One  
 Shall not, then, fan my temples, when 't is done,  
 This hard-fought fight ; your fingers shall untie  
 My earthward bonds ; your voices silently  
 Whisper, " Come home, your course is but begun ;"  
 And in your arms borne upward, far on high,  
 With mind and heart tuned to heaven's harmony,  
 I shall know all, love all, and find 'tis Life to die."

Vol. i. p. 371.

The prayer is answered. For a brief space of bewilderment and agony, " the shining ones," under whose watch and ward he had led a life so sacred and so beautiful, may have been withdrawn from his view, and " the pinions of the Dark and Dreaded One " flapped heavily upon his flesh-burdened spirit. Then indeed he

" sank low, but mounted high  
 Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves,  
 Where other groves, and other streams along,  
 With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,  
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,  
 In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
 There entertain him all the saints above,  
 In solemn troops and sweet societies,  
 That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
 And wipe the tears forever from his eyes."